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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KU](#) [FREEDOM](#) [AGENDA](#) [NATIONAL](#) [ASSEMBLY](#)

SUBJECT: AMIR'S ATTEMPT TO QUELL RULING FAMILY DISPUTES  
ONLY A TEMPORARY SOLUTION

REF: A. KUWAIT 522  
[¶](#)B. 06 KUWAIT 4498  
[¶](#)C. 06 KUWAIT 4430

Classified By: Charge d'Affairs Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)  
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[¶](#)1. (SBU) Summary and comment: In a rare meeting of senior Al-Sabah family members April 14, Amir Shaykh Sabah issued a strong warning not to air intra-ruling family rivalries in public via proxies and stressed that he had no intention to dissolve Parliament or amend the constitution. The Crown Prince and Shaykh Salem Al-Ali, the most senior member of the other leading branch of the Al-Sabah family, also spoke, emphasizing their loyalty to the Amir and urging ruling family members to set aside their differences. In a significant symbolic gesture, National Security Bureau President Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd, whose aspirations to the emirate many believe are at the heart of the divisions within the ruling family, kissed the head of Defense/Interior Minister Shaykh Jaber Al-Mubarak as a sign of reconciliation and respect. Kuwaitis across the board praised the Amir's "clear and unequivocal" commitment to the constitution and denial of any plans to dissolve the Parliament.

[¶](#)2. (C/NF) Summary and comment (continued): The Amir's comments do little to resolve the underlying problems at the root of the internal ruling family rivalries: the weakness of the Crown Prince and Prime Minister and the ambitions of younger Shaykhs, particularly Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd. Given the Amir's age and health problems, ambitious ruling family members are likely to continue to jockey to position themselves for one of the country's top leadership positions when Shaykh Sabah dies. Some like Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd may feel this is their only shot at power, believing that further democratic reforms, if unchecked, could undermine the ruling family's dominant role in the decision-making process. The Amir's denial of plans to dissolve Parliament or amend the constitution are similar to statements he made last fall and unlikely to be the final word on the subject. Parliamentarians and political leaders likely trumpeted the Amir's "commitment" to the constitution and denial of any intention to dissolve the Parliament to make it harder for him to do exactly that at some point in the future. End summary and comment.

[¶](#)3. (SBU) Amir Shaykh Sabah called a rare meeting of nearly 200 senior Al-Sabah family members April 14 in an attempt to control increasingly bitter and public intra-ruling family disputes. The meeting comes amid rumors the Amir was considering dissolving Parliament unconstitutionally (i.e. for more than two months), and less than a week after veteran opposition MP Ahmed Al-Saadoun warned that the Al-Sabah regime would end if the constitution were amended, an unprecedented and highly controversial statement that has

drawn considerable criticism from many Kuwaitis. According to press reports, the Amir was very direct and issued a strong warning to family members not to air personal rivalries and disputes in public by attacking each other through proxies in newspapers or in diwaniyas. He urged Al-Sabah family members to resolve their differences and set an example for the rest of Kuwait. Shaykh Sabah told family members that if they had a problem they could go to the Family Council or the Crown Prince, and if they were still not happy "my doors are always open." In addition, the Amir announced the formation of a committee to address ruling family problems.

¶4. (C/NF) The Amir also stressed that he had "no intention to amend the constitution" and had "never thought of dissolving the Parliament either constitutionally or unconstitutionally." (Comment: According to numerous contacts, including one influential Al-Sabah (ref B), the Amir openly discussed the possibility of dissolving Parliament unconstitutionally in three separate meetings last November, including one with the Chamber of Commerce (ref C). After strong public opposition to such a move, Shaykh Sabah told the Editors-in-Chief of Kuwait's top dailies that he had never considered an unconstitutional dissolution, an assertion no one dared contradict publicly. End comment.) The Amir added that he had listened to a recording of Al-Saadoun's statements and agreed that they had been "distorted" by the press. He said he "appreciated" Al-Saadoun's comments and took them as "advice." "The problem is not in the constitution, but rather in you (ruling family members)...as all of you want to be ministers and fight, and shift your fights to the media," Shaykh Sabah concluded.

KUWAIT 00000566 002 OF 003

¶5. (SBU) Crown Prince Shaykh Nawaf Al-Ahmed and Shaykh Salem Al-Ali Al-Salem, the Chief of the National Guard and the most senior member of the Al-Salem branch of the Al-Sabah family, also spoke at the meeting. They emphasized their allegiance to the Amir and called for Al-Sabah family unity. According to press reports, at the request of Deputy National Guard Chief Shaykh Mishal Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber, National Security Bureau President Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd kissed Defense/Interior Minister Shaykh Jaber Al-Mubarak on the forehead as a sign of reconciliation and great respect. Many Kuwaitis believe the meeting was meant as a message to Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd, the former Minister of Energy and a close confidant of the Amir's, and other young, ambitious Al-Sabah family members whose jockeying for future leadership positions has divided the ruling family.

#### The Frontlines in the Al-Sabah Power Struggle

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¶6. (C/NF) Ahmed Deyain, a well-connected political analyst and writer, told PolOffs April 4, prior to the ruling family meeting, that the source of the family's internal tensions was the battle being waged by Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd and his supporters, including Speaker of Parliament Jassem Al-Khorafi, Editor-in-Chief of Al-Watan (Arabic daily) Khalifa Ali Al-Khalifa, and to some extent the Amir, against Shaykh Jaber Al-Mubarak, Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Mohammed, and Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Shaykh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmed, the Amir's son. According to Deyain, more than just future leadership positions are at stake. He claimed the two groups differed fundamentally in their views on how the country should be governed. Deyain, who clearly sides with the Prime Minister's camp, argued that Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd and those around him opposed democratic reform and wanted to weaken Parliament and continue to rule through patronage, as has traditionally been done in this tribal society. Deyain said the Prime Minister, Shaykh Jaber Al-Mubarak, and Shaykh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmed, on the other hand, believed in working with Parliament and within Kuwait's constitutional framework, and recognized that Kuwait's

constitution was unique in that it enshrined the Al-Sabah's role in Kuwait's political system, a role they could lose if the constitution were tampered with, as Al-Saadoun argued.

¶7. (C/NF) Deyain believed tensions had risen to a "boiling point" recently due to the poor health of the Amir, which prompted "all those ambitious for power to move quickly (to secure their positions)." (Comment: In an April 15 meeting with PolOff, prominent Shi'a businessman Anwar Bukhamseen said someone in the Amir's office told him that the Amir complained in a recent meeting that he was having problems with his prostate in addition to his heart problems. End comment.) Deyain said these tensions were exacerbated by the weakness of the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, and the Amir's "unprecedented centralization of decision-making authority." He claimed, as have many other contacts, that Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd engineered the grilling of former Minister of Health Shaykh Ahmed Abdullah, which lead the entire Cabinet to resign, to undermine Shaykh Nasser Mohammed's government and prove the Cabinet could not function without him. When the Cabinet resigned, Deyain said Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd lobbied hard (but unsuccessfully) to be appointed Minister of Interior, in part to weaken Shaykh Jaber Al-Mubarak and perhaps reinstate his brother Shaykh Athbi Al-Fahd, who was dismissed as Director of Kuwait State Security in November by Shaykh Jaber Al-Mubarak. Deyain claimed Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd was also behind Al-Watan's "onslaught" against Shaykh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmed, one of his main political rivals, over the past month. On the Al-Sabah meeting, Deyain cautioned that words alone would not resolve the bitter disputes within the ruling family.

#### Kuwaitis Praise Amir's Commitment to Constitution

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¶8. (SBU) Kuwaitis across the board praised the Amir's "clear and unequivocal" commitment to the constitution and denial of any plans to dissolve the Parliament. They also welcomed his efforts to settle disputes within the ruling family. Speaker of Parliament Jassem Al-Khorafi reaffirmed the Kuwaiti people's loyalty to the Al-Sabah leadership and said the ruling family meeting demonstrated "the love, loyalty, and dedication...of the rulers to (the Kuwaiti) people," local press reported April 15. MP Mohammed Jassem Al-Sager, the Chairman of Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, said the Amir's speech came at "the right time" and "underscored the deep-rootedness of the ruling regime and its democratic, contractual, and constitutional nature." MP Mishari Al-Anjari said Shaykh Sabah's comments had "put an end to

KUWAIT 00000566 003 OF 003

rumors circulated occasionally on the unconstitutional dissolution of Parliament or the revision of the constitution in an unconstitutional manner." Other MPs and political leaders expressed similar views and called on the ruling family to close its ranks for the unity and stability of the country.

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